



African American Health Coalition

Public Health Problem

Death rates for cardiovascular disease among African Americans living in Oregon are alarmingly high, considering the small size of the population. In Oregon, the average 10-year, age-adjusted rate for stroke mortality is 59.3 percent among African Americans and 29 percent among whites. This finding translates to a 51 percent higher chance of a stroke for African Americans than for whites. Similarly, the compressed 10-year mortality rate for cardiovascular disease among African Americans in Oregon is 121.8 percent compared with 89 percent among whites. The gap between mortality from cardiovascular disease among African Americans and among whites is 26 percent in Oregon compared with 10 percent nationally. Reducing risk factors for cardiovascular disease (smoking, physical inactivity, poor nutrition, diabetes and obesity) can improve health and quality of life, and reduce healthcare costs.

Taking Action

Oregon's African American Health Coalition, Inc. (AAHC) implemented a variety of community-based strategies to address the root causes of the gap in mortality between cardiovascular disease among African Americans and whites. The program "Lookin' Tight, Livin' Right" uses existing relationships between beauty shop and barbershop operators and their clients to promote healthy behaviors. An intervention for youth, HOLLA!, partners with local high schools and trains students to educate their peers about cardiovascular disease and its risk factors. To reach low-income African Americans enrolled in the Oregon Medicaid program, another intervention uses educational mailings designed to raise awareness and increase use of preventive services. The Coalition's Wellness Within REACH (WWR) program consists of free physical activity classes centered on the African American community to open access by increasing the affordability, availability, and comfort level of leading an active lifestyle.

Implications and Impact

Of participants in the Wellness Within REACH program, 58 percent reported exercising more than they had 6 months previously. This program has become a "movement" in the local community, changing the community's norm toward physical activity. In September 2003, AAHC launched its first annual Wellness Within REACH Walk to celebrate the community's health and raise funds to sustain WWR classes. The event drew more than 500 participants and illustrates the community's support for AAHC's community-based, innovative REACH programs.

Contact Information

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